

The Library Assistant

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Our Best Friends . . .

IT WAS felt that opportunity should be given to overseas librarians to share in our celebrations of the centenary of the first British Public Libraries Act; invitations were therefore sent to nearly forty librarians in over thirty countries to contribute to a centenary symposium. It is regretted that owing to illness, overwork, absence or modesty, only a proportion of them felt able to comply with our request, but to those who have responded we express our gratitude for their stimulating contributions.

To all the assurance was given that British librarians would not be offended if they spoke their mind freely, for to have invited platitudes would have been to waste an unique opportunity to see ourselves as others see us. The regretted inability of some librarians to contribute may have resulted in an unbalanced picture, but that individually and together our eminent colleagues have provided material for serious consideration cannot, we believe, be denied. If anything read in this international symposium provokes indignant expostulation, the reader will have an opportunity to re-examine his premises, reconsider his motives, and judge whether his opinions have been the product of logical thought or of wistful thinking.

The given theme was "Lessons to be learned from one hundred years of British public libraries," and the variations on it which follow form a composite work that is worthy of serious study, written as it is by some of the most acute minds in the profession. We hope that it may have the effect of provoking much discussion by to-day's assistant librarians, on whom will rest responsibility for British public libraries' development in the future.

Unesco

E. J. CARTER, B.A., A.R.I.B.A. (*Head of Libraries Division, Unesco*).

The natural comment of a Unesco observer from the wide arena of international affairs on the lessons of a hundred years of British public library development is to observe that the problems of British public libraries, taken as a whole, provide a remarkably accurate microcosm of the world problems which Unesco is facing. Britain has certainly won most, but not yet all, of her public library battles. There still remain some problems of unevenness of development, the problems of leading readers on from "cheap" fiction to reading of greater cultural value, and, as some suggest,

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the problem of associating public libraries functionally with adult education activities. In the Unesco world there are certain countries, just as some years ago there were and perhaps even now in Britain there are some boroughs and counties, in which the responsible people are hardly aware of the variety and quality of the contribution of public libraries to the cultural, technical, scholastic and social life of the people.

The largest and simplest lesson is that public libraries can provide a service of books, which before the days of public libraries not merely did not exist for everybody but was in fact possessed by nobody, not even the wealthiest. The public library battle has still to be fought out by Unesco in many of its Member States individually and in a wider sense in all of its Member States co-operatively. This last point is important if the wealth of experience of the more advanced is to be fully used. It is certainly true, as another lesson from British public librarianship, that the advances could never have been achieved but for the centralising influence of the Library Association. Unesco, co-operatively, through its Member States and the International Federation of Library Associations, has to fill the same place as the L.A. in stimulating improvements and advising those who are carrying on the local battles.

We can learn also from British library service practice that public libraries, which must be intimately related to the customs and interests and economy of their readers, will differ widely from place to place. Those differences may not be sharply defined within one small area such as Britain but they are important over the whole world. The spirit, the ideals, the general philosophy and much of the practice are held in common but public libraries, as free demonstrations of the wish of ordinary people to have access to the wealth of all that exists in printed form or audio-visual record cannot be subject to organisational dogma and will differ from place to place: world as well as national plans must take account of this.

Australia

JOHN METCALFE, B.A., F.L.A. (*Principal Librarian, Public Library of New South Wales, and President, Library Association of Australia*).

It would not be easy to avoid platitude and be fairly controversial on the lessons of one hundred years in three hundred words, and, of course, its lessons for Australia may not be its lessons for Britain.

In some directions we have learnt too slowly, and so slowly that we began replacing century old mechanics' institutes with local public libraries only yesterday. But we have learnt that the following things are valuable:—

(1) Library Acts so far in four of our six states, not compulsory, but with grants-in-aid to adopting councils.

(2) Emphasis on local public libraries as information and research bureaux for all, rather than as free versions of the rental and subscription libraries.

(3) Use of the local public library for serious as well as escape reading by children of all ages, apart from school libraries staffed by qualified teachers with extra training in librarianship.

(4) Long established and well catalogued state reference libraries

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with extension departments, and more lately, in two of the states, promising library schools.

(5) A comparative and unprejudiced study of library practice, in at least all English speaking countries.

(6) An association certification system with high standards and control exclusively by fully qualified members.

(7) Equal opportunities of library employment and promotion for men and women.

(8) Systematic tertiary education in all kinds of librarianship, and encouragement of university graduates to enter library work, but without any reduction of professional requirements, and of juniors to become graduates through evening courses, to raise the standards and status of librarianship.

My last words: greetings to those whom Herman Melville called poor devils of sub-sub-librarians, on whose labours the success of a century have largely turned, from whose ranks chief librarians should come. *Morituri, vos salutamus.*

Denmark

DR. ROBERT L. HANSEN (*Director of Danish Public Libraries*).

The following observations are based chiefly on the reading of British library periodicals and books, and, unfortunately, less on personal experience on the spot. What I have learned in that manner may be stated briefly like this:—

The British library law, which has now existed for a hundred years, ought to have provided from its very start or as soon as possible thereafter for full and equal access to the use of the libraries for the entire population of the country. As it happened, it was the cities only that got their library systems, while the countryside was without them for generations. From this I have learned that it is necessary for the state to participate in the creation of the library system of a country, which means that the state must subsidize the libraries and supervise them. This will make for sufficient funds also for the smaller libraries in towns and villages, and the state supervision will safeguard a uniform library system for the entire country. In England, there was too great a discrepancy between the library service rendered to the various groups of the population. Some got good service, others none. Co-operation from the state would have made possible a national library system many years ago.

Co-operation from the state was also lacking in the schooling of librarians. A uniform system of library schools would have created a profession whose members would have been able to hold their own economically and socially anywhere in the country, having been trained at national academies of the same calibre as those at which other professional people get their education. As it turned out, only the cities got a staff of librarians who were able to hold their own with other city officials.

As to the book collections which the public libraries built up, it seems to me that I have noticed a certain indifference in regard to the standard of the contents represented in the fiction section. According to my views,

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it is of paramount importance to let fiction play a decisive part in the educational efforts of the library. Consequently, I cannot stress too strongly how important I find it to have this part of the book collections reach the same high level as the non-fiction. Perhaps we have fallen into the opposite ditch in Denmark, so possibly British and Danish librarians can learn from each other and thereby find the right balance.

During my personal visits to British public libraries, I have missed a certain degree of neatness, cleanliness and beauty for which we strive, at least in the better public libraries in Denmark. The appearance of the books has often struck me as being of a low degree. It is impossible to make the borrowers treat the books well unless the books which they receive at the library are clean and neat looking. Of course, it is a matter of money, but in the long run it will often provide a sound economy to spend sufficient money on replacements and rebinding.

On the credit side I find many things that are instructive to us. It was, for instance, an asset that the work was started by laying the foundation in the cities. In Denmark the initial development took place in the country districts, with the result that several hundred small, independent parish libraries were started without ever becoming real libraries: in England the libraries of the large city communities were the ones to set the standard in respect of purpose and methods and thereby give the norm for the entire system of public libraries. In the large communities of the cities and towns, the varied needs for books among the many different groups of people were understood. As a consequence, it did not take long to build up a library system which addressed itself to all parts of the city population. It became indeed a public library of a kind which was unknown on the Continent and it became a model for the Scandinavian library pioneers. The service which was rendered to business and industry won the goodwill of the authorities, which the cities of Scandinavia have only recently begun to build up.

The numerous library buildings which were erected in Great Britain taught us that a library "gets its own face" only when it gets its own building. In our country we were satisfied too often and too long with structures which had been erected for other purposes (churches, schools, etc.). As a consequence of this we had to do for a long time without being able to count among our borrowers the kind of people who are not accustomed to seeking the lowly places.

Furthermore, we have admired the attitude of the British county authorities toward the library work in the country districts where considerable amounts of money have been invested in this work during recent years. It is evident to me that the kind of library activity which is now radiating from the county libraries into the rural areas, with book automobiles and professional librarians, holds possibilities for the country people's use of books which in most cases is far beyond what can be accomplished by our small, independent parish libraries run by teachers.

Of course, the regional system and The National Central Library also have our admiration. The former might possibly be copied with profit in Denmark; the latter has been copied long ago, and the Danish Information

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Office is deeply grateful for the service which is given us from Malet Place.

What we have finally learned from Great Britain is that the public libraries, when they have been put into good shape and been given the necessary funds, are able to enlist as librarians and assistants highly qualified persons. This in turn has been the starting point of a high quality of professional library literature, from which we are constantly learning. The flourishing initiative which British librarians have been demonstrating in every respect since the end of the second world war has caused young librarians in Denmark to make every effort to undertake the not insurmountable trip to England, to whose people we feel closely related, in order to study new ways and means which may also help us to go forward.

Holland

DR. T. P. SEVENSMA (*Librarian, University of Leyden; President, International Federation of Library Associations*).

There is an old and well-known theory that all civilisation has travelled over the world from East to West. In its general form this may be a debatable truth, but in relation to libraries and especially to public libraries it is decidedly false. In Western Europe, in any case in Holland, Public Libraries have to look to the West for their origin.

Since 1851, at the discussion in Parliament of the new Municipal Corporation Act, some progressive statesmen and prominent businessmen have drawn attention to the absence in Holland of the equivalent of the English Public Library.

In this flourishing period of liberalism there existed in Holland in some towns, clubs with reading material for the better-off in society; on the other hand there were here and there very "popular" libraries providing from a philanthropic point of view reading matter for the working classes. The advocates of the English public library for the general reader did not find a hearing for their ideas between these two conceptions till the end of the 19th century.

From the beginning of the 20th century onwards, the Public Library has slowly been taking its place in public life. First hesitatingly in the steps of the popular library, later on in a more independent way, especially through the persistent and prudent propaganda of the Central Association for Public Libraries and Reading Rooms.

But how to create a new sort of libraries without an adequate staff? And here again English practice has guided the first steps of the pioneering librarians. Their manuals were English. The courses by correspondence were imported from England. The examinations were on the level of those in England. And the first librarians to take their degree completed their courses by a term of probation in an English Public Library (Croydon).

Dutch public libraries may generally be on a very modest scale in comparison to English ones (there was no Carnegie for Holland!) but their fundamental conception, their technical equipment, their attitude toward the public is still largely influenced not by examples from the East but from the island to the West. They are in keeping with the national character of the people.

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India

DR. S. R. RANGANATHAN (*Professor of Library Science, University of Delhi; President, Indian Library Association*).

First, India's felicitations to Great Britain on the occasion of the Centenary of her first Public Library Act!

The duration of the preliminary spade-work done in India prior to her first Library Act (1949) has been nearly the same as that of the effort of Edward Edwards prior to the Ewart Act (1850).

The course of British Library Legislation has been consciously or unconsciously influencing many countries as a model for either imitation or counter-imitation. Failure to fix a minimum for the size of an independent local library unit, keeping the Ministry of Education out of the library picture, and regarding library service as a matter of local, and not of national concern, are some of the matters for counter-imitation.

The evolution of rural library service and its rapid march during the last twenty years has inspired many countries. In my library tour of Great Britain in 1948 I found that rationalisation of library practice has led to many innovations which were breaking down encrustations caused by tradition. This progressive re-evaluation of every element in library service is one of the lessons to be learnt from 100 years of British Public Libraries.

The greatest of the lessons is that no money-sieve should be put between the reader and the book. "Cash and carry" is out of place in libraries. Payment for library service should be indirect and in the measure of one's taxable capacity and not of the the service taken. The world-trend in the extinguishment of accumulated wealth in private hands and in the levelling of personal income is proving the wisdom of this Library Magna Carta.

New Zealand

C. W. COLLINS, M.A., A.B.L.S., F.L.A. (*Librarian, Canterbury University College, Christchurch; President, New Zealand Library Association*).

From the country farthest away from England geographically, though the nearest in many other ways, I am glad to send congratulations upon a century of remarkable public library progress; and, on behalf of the New Zealand Library Association, to hope that no less an advance will be recorded by A.D. 2050.

You invite frank comment and not mere eulogy: so I shall have the temerity to express an opinion or two. But I must make it clear, first, that, although interested in public libraries, I am a university librarian, and that my knowledge of the English library scheme has, since 1933, been second-hand; and, second, that our experience has been different from yours. New Zealand libraries have, like myself, drawn inspiration from North America as well as from Great Britain.

In our earlier days especially, we were, naturally, much influenced by English libraries and by librarians who had received some early training in England and Scotland; but we copied the mechanics' institutes and subscrip-

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tion libraries of your first period when, despite the Act of 1850, progress was very slow for nearly half a century. With these unsatisfactory models, with the economic difficulties of our pioneering period, and with a sparse and scattered population, public library progress was faltering and not widespread. Here and there sound work was done, and in two or three places, under the stimulation of Carnegie building grants, free services were established. But our main heritage was an incomplete system of subscription libraries of widely differing types, sizes, aims and standards, alike only in that downhill tendency inseparable from a "public" library dependent upon subscriptions.

In the last twenty years, however, there has been remarkable progress, largely because of the stimulus of the Carnegie travelling grants that many of us have received. Some larger towns have abandoned the subscription basis and many of the smaller boroughs and country districts now maintain free libraries, through the help of the Government Country Library Service. Here and there, outstanding librarianship has triumphed over all difficulties to produce results and attitudes that would be a credit anywhere.

We have been inspired by your almost complete geographical coverage, which difficulties of local government and of rural finance have so far prevented us from matching. We have followed your examples of inter-library co-operation and, because of the imperative needs of our unique conditions, far from the world's centres of publishing and of learning, have in some ways surpassed you. We have noted the bold plans for town and country regionalism as proposed by McColvin, and these have reinforced our own intentions to look further in a similar direction. We have admired, but hardly begun to parallel, the improved architecture and atmosphere of your newer buildings and renovations.

But, to speak bluntly and for myself alone now, I fear that your public libraries still show too clearly their ancestry as a "charity" service. By and large, in North America the libraries really do belong to all the people, regardless of distinctions of wealth, social position or educational background; and I hope that we shall continue to develop in the same way here. Have you yet gained the firm support of the middle and upper classes? Admittedly your great references libraries are widely appreciated, but they are "tools" rather than social influences. Are your libraries generally enough recognised—and used—as "people's universities," and as genuine bulwarks of democracy? Should not citizens, having bought such books as they wish and can afford to own, turn naturally to their public library for *all* their worth-while reading, rather than to independent and expensive commercial subscription services? Your present dichotomy must seriously undermine popular financial support. I suspect that the analogy of the public baths is still uncomfortably close—a service provided by the community, somewhat reluctantly but of necessity, for those who cannot provide it for themselves.

In emerging slowly from the subscription strait-jacket, we are using the device of rental collections, quite deliberately, and, I think, effectively. Could you not, for a different purpose, make good use of the same

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machinery? There is a standard below which no public library should stock books under any circumstances. And there is a standard, much higher, below which public funds are not properly expended. Yet between these two limits much reading is done, of both fiction and recreational non-fiction. A realistic rental system—not a mere “pay-duplicate” service—can relieve the library of a heavy expenditure at this level, can permit more spending on material, including fiction, of a more socially valuable type, can meet practically all book needs of readers without driving them elsewhere, and can remove the objections of ratepayers who concede an educational claim for the public library but not a soporific one. Librarians should bear in mind that there is community approval for the supply of free milk to schoolchildren but not of free beer to university students! By wise use of an attractive, self-supporting rental service to complement a free stock comprising good books to the limit of available funds, a library can ensure widely based use, approval and support. The prestige of the lending department can be enhanced and the way opened to that closer integration of reference and lending work and stock which seems to me another of the urgent needs of those most interesting institutions—English public libraries.

Norway

DR. ARNE KILDAL (*Librarian, State Library, Oslo*).

Probably it is no exaggeration to maintain that all civilised countries have learned a lesson from the principles and systems adopted by British public libraries as a result of the British Library Act of 1850, and of its later amendments. In spite of the fact that this act proved unsatisfactory in some details to start with, it succeeded in calling the attention of both authorities and public to the importance and beneficial influence of municipal libraries. It is true that the development of the libraries was hampered by the insufficient economic support granted during the first twenty years after the act had been passed, but nevertheless the act was influential through its bare existence and the rapid library development that followed in great Britain after 1870 made itself strongly felt even in Norway. As years passed, British library methods became the pattern and example in our country also.

Norwegian librarians who had followed and experienced the adoption of more modern library systems in Great Britain towards the close of the century felt convinced of their practical adaptability in other countries too, and set to work to have them introduced in the home field. Around the century mark, British and American library methods were adopted by some of the larger public libraries of Norway, both in regard to classification, cataloguing, loan work, reference service and other items, and later the same methods were adopted by the smaller libraries also. The principles embodied in the original British library act and its later amendments led to a renewed interest in this branch of adult education, which gradually became personified, so to speak, in the large number of beautiful library buildings erected in Great Britain from 1890 onwards.

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The strong and weak points of the original British library law, the writer is not qualified to analyse. It is safe to say, however, that the first library law of Norway, which was not passed until the year of 1935, bears traces of British influence in some of its paragraphs. It is sufficient to point to the regulations concerning state appropriations to central libraries operating over larger areas and the co-operation between the central libraries and rural and urban libraries alike.

The Norwegian library law of 1935 was revised in 1947, and in its present form contains certain regulations which may prove to be of interest even to the library profession of some other countries. First of all the law introduces obligatory public libraries making it a duty for the municipal boards to establish and support by a certain minimum appropriation a public library for the municipality. In the same way school districts are obliged by law to establish and conduct libraries for the pupils in all public schools in rural districts. A rather remarkable feature of the library act of Norway concerns an economic compensation offered the authors for the loan of their books through the medium of the public libraries. The compensation amounts to a certain percentage (5%) of the annual appropriation which the government grants public libraries for the purchase of new books to their institutions. Finally may be mentioned as a special feature of the Norwegian law the obligation of every state supported public library to pay the librarian an annual salary, the size of which has to be sanctioned by the Government Library Board. The purpose of this latter regulation naturally is to prevent underpayment of librarians which previously occurred in quite a number of cases.

Speaking of lessons to be learned from British library activities, space allows mention only of the excellent system of co-operation which has been in operation for many years in Great Britain. In the centre of this system of co-operation is found the National Central Library in London, lending books all over the country and operating through a large number of local organs, the latter having at their disposal a complete union catalogue of books of all the libraries in their districts. Indeed, this system, as based on a safe co-operative spirit, deserves to be copied in other countries as well, and if thus followed certainly would lead to a rapid development of the national library movement everywhere and a development in the right direction into the bargain.

Commemorating the centenary of the enactment of the world's first library law, it is natural to offer the most cordial felicitations of Norwegian librarians to the library profession of the United Kingdom. To our sincere felicitations we add our best wishes for the British library work of the future, trusting that continually it may inspire, stimulate and influence public library activities all over the globe as it has already done so decisively for the last one hundred years.

South Africa

D. H. VARLEY, M.A., F.L.A. (*Secretary and Librarian, South African Library; Past President, South African Library Association*).

1. *Rate-limitation*: to be avoided like the plague by all those who plan

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- new public library services. An obvious lesson, but a potent one.
2. *Charity Institution*: A library service flourishes or languishes according to the prevailing social climate. Few things are so striking in the history of British public libraries during the past 30 years, as the emergency of the library as a *positive* unit in the welfare state: compared with the "charity institution" of a century ago.
 3. *Public library service as part of a whole*. This lesson, it would seem, is still being learned. The visitor to British libraries cannot help noticing, in professional affairs, a divergence between "popular" and "learned" libraries (or librarians?) representing an essentially artificial conflict. National Libraries are public libraries, too. Wasn't the Library Association launched from the Bodleian, and isn't the British Museum in the van of public library progress to-day?

There are plenty more lessons to be learned; but, writing as a British-trained Librarian since transplanted, may I content myself with saluting British colleagues and wishing them an even more successful second hundred years?

Sweden

G. OSTLING (*Hon. Secretary, Swedish Library Association*).

In the educational work of democratic society, the public libraries play a decisive part: we librarians know it. Not all citizens know it as yet, but they will be brought to hold this view. If it be the primary purpose of our schools to impart knowledge, then it is the special task of the libraries to develop independent judgment. Only if knowledge be coupled with discrimination, will it be useful to us. Our power of judgment is cultivated through the association with stimulating and imaginative impulses, or, one might say, through association with the arts, among which literature is one, and perhaps the foremost, simply because of its directness, its accessibility. The library is the principal distributor of works of literature. The library must be active: it has to find the potential interest of groups and individuals, so it must arouse these interests, cultivate and strengthen them. In this way, the library will be an educational factor of consequence, a requisite to form the responsible and far-sighted, the critical yet tolerant citizen, who is the essence of democratic society.

We have come to regard England as one of the native lands of democracy. It seems natural, therefore, that the democratic mentality of the English people should have permeated, among other things, its library system which has left fundamental and stimulating values to the world, and not least to Swedish librarians. It seems natural, also, that the English library system should have a vital share in the strength of English democracy, to which we all are so much indebted.

English librarians of to-day have a great wealth of traditions behind them. They may be proud of the fact that the public library system of England has served as a model to those of other countries. But traditions mean obligations, it has been said. Consequently, traditions must be kept alive; they must not be permitted to congeal in convenient patterns.

The best wish that could be extended to the library system of England

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on its centennial is that it might always, by maintaining traditional values, further the democratic spirit of English society. Then it is up to the individual librarian not only to do his best (which is self-evident), but always to want to do it even better.

United States

DR. LUTHER H. EVANS (*Librarian of Congress*).

What a year of library celebrations this is! The American Library Association observes its seventy-fifth anniversary, the Library of Congress marks its one hundred and fiftieth, and the opportunity to congratulate my English colleagues upon the centenary of the passage of the first British Public Libraries Act is a third and happy satisfaction. Institutions which endure have reasons for their being, and if I were asked to find an explanation of survival I would look for it in the long record of collaboration which from the beginnings has characterised the progress of libraries and the steady development of the library movement. Collaboration has wrought techniques commonly employed; it has provided standards and maintained them; it has produced the magnificent apparatus; it has made partisans for the present. Together we have reached through time. Together we have further still to go. For our needs are derived of being needed. To-day our duties to the free mind are as clear, as real, as peremptory, as are the threats against it. In such a situation we cannot, for fulfilment, be content to hold our gains; we must devise new and more effective methods, we must discover applications for the advance of science and invention, we must pool our resources and in council make our plans, we must arouse fresh imaginations and invigorate action with the strength of youthful purpose, we must not be afraid of change but seek it for the sake of service to an ancient cause.

DR. LEON CARNOVSKY (*Professor of Library Science, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago*).

After a hundred years the hearings before the Select Committee of the House of Commons "on the best Means of extending the Establishment of Libraries" still make good reading. One may smile at the high hopes there expressed—that the library would soften the burden of the workingman, that it would serve as a counter-attraction to the pub, to dens of vice, to the worldly demands of the flesh. These hopes unfulfilled are now not even seriously held by realistic librarians. But other values there surely are. If some expectations of the founding fathers proved evanescent, even whimsical, the flourishing British libraries are a monument to the breadth and substance of their imagination.

The public library's role in 1950 as preserving the cultural heritage and disseminating information is not contested. Far less often do we speak of its moral responsibility; indeed, we frequently deny that it has such a responsibility, holding that even endorsement of what is generally accepted as morally right constitutes a betrayal of the library's proper neutrality. This must mean, I suppose, equating the immoral with the moral, war with peace, crime with order, falsehood with truth, even barbarism with

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civilisation.

Shall the librarian stand for anything at all? Shall he make even so obvious a moral judgment as that war is evil, that therefore it behoves him to bring the influence of his library to bear on the side of peace, justice, and international good-will? This I believe to be the fundamental issue confronting us to-day. Many will shrug their shoulders and conclude that such efforts will yield little more than did the earnest anti-vice crusades of the 1850's. Others will be more hopeful; they will have sufficient faith in the power of print to use it to promote the conditions of peace. Acknowledging that the library alone cannot make much of a dent, nevertheless they will affirm that any dent, however small, is worth making. The great decision, then, is between indifferentism and action.

This decision awaits the young men and women who will be the library leaders of to-morrow. The lesson of the first hundred years of British librarianship is that action rather than passivity led to the creation of the public library and its development as a great institution. We must now decide how that institution may be used in the cause of justice, enlightenment, and peace.

United Kingdom

LIONEL R. MCCOLVIN, F.L.A. (*City Librarian of Westminster and Honorary Secretary of the Library Association*).

I have been asked by your editor to state in not more than 500 words what we have learned from one hundred years of public library service. Probably the answer would have been much the same had I, as I was tempted, asked permission to change the question to (a) what *should* we have learned, or (b) what have I personally learned during nearly half that period. For my own introduction to the public library service which has provided my livelihood since 1911 was some years earlier. At the age of five I was taken by an elder brother (later himself to become a librarian) to a London public library. There I learned my first lesson. To keep me quiet while he read, my brother set me to make a list of birds, copying their names from books. When I had exhausted those on the open shelves the assistants went to immense trouble to supplement my resources. I know now that I was even entrusted to turn the pages of Gould. The lesson? A great one—that whatever the reader wants, whoever he is and whatever his motives, he must be given the maximum assistance, without question. Translated into wider terms, the value of the public library rests on recognition of the fundamental fact that it does its work only by serving individuals and that the library fails when it fails the individual. All the things I have learned since are but aspects of that fundamental appreciation of purpose.

For example, I learned under Jast and young Berwick Sayers, his then Deputy at Croydon, firstly that to serve individuals libraries must be efficient, business-like concerns, and secondly that libraries are not run by chiefs and deputies but by their staffs as a whole. It is true to say that to most users the "librarian" is the particular man or woman, boy or girl, who serves

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him. Unless this boy or girl believes in the library, neither will the reader. The task of the Chief Librarian is that of helping the boy and girl, the man or woman at the counter or the reference desk, to believe in the value of his job, and to provide him with the tools he needs to do it satisfactorily. I learned also from these my first chiefs that library staffs can both make themselves effective and enjoy their work only if they are given the maximum freedom and scope for initiative. Since then I've striven—how successfully only my staff can say—to regard the total personnel not as a group of people doing what they are told, but as a band of colleagues with varied responsibilities but a common task and a common duty to the public.

I learned later, too, that libraries cannot stand alone, that only by co-operation, co-ordination, the pooling of resources and the planned creation of resources could we hope to give individual service. I learned that it was not the small, inadequate library that needed most the help of other libraries so much as the library which, by comparative standards was good, because that library was one which attracted to it the people—the “real” people—who wanted to do something. But here, of course, I come to the one great lesson. The library that is not much good is probably no good. To modify the statement let me say instead that only when a library is good can a librarian understand how much better it ought to be and must become.

And I have learned that our best is not good enough. Had I experienced the fortune of working for other, more “average” authorities I might have been satisfied that I had done my best. Instead, in my forty years' work, I have learned the one lesson of our centenary—that when the librarian feels satisfied with his library he should either resign or be sacked.

What else? Much. For example, that we get nothing and nowhere without wanting it and fighting for it if necessary—that libraries are vitally important, that we fail often because we under-estimate our public, that what we have achieved, despite our limitations and deficiencies, is an example that other nations look to. I've learned also that I'd rather be a librarian than anything else.

I'm sorry, Mr. Editor, if after all I've answered my question instead of you.

H. M. CASHMORE, M.B.E., F.L.A. (*Emeritus Librarian of the City of Birmingham, and Past President of the Library Association*).

In these days, when even the wealthiest man cannot afford to buy all the books he ought to want, it is hard to realise the intellectual aridity of the country when ordinary people depended on their own pockets to provide meagre sources of inspiration and information in printed books. Those people when they read must have been more enthusiastic than many of the millions who now have freely at their disposal all the records of the wisdom and knowledge of past ages, present activity and the prospects of future expanding worlds. Since the first Public Library Act broke into the dark ages of ignorance, the number of books has increased so enormously that librarians have come to realise precisely (as readers do more vaguely) the need for guides through the riches which otherwise become an embarrass-

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ment ; for assessment of relative values of books ; for bibliographies ; for time-saving abstracts. We have realised, too, that the wealthiest community cannot provide for all the needs of its citizens without co-operation with other communities. More recently the distrust of the carelessness and restrictions of printed information has driven us to collect as many as possible of the manuscript sources which are the basis of the small part which gets itself into print. The increase of knowledge has, unfortunately, made impossible the universality which was the aim of early scholars, and even with specialisation the expert is no longer able to grasp the bibliography of his chosen subject and the librarian has to be his servant and guide. Indeed, librarians have now to decide frequently in which field of bibliography they will themselves specialise. But, in spite of the bewildering increase of obviously important knowledge, we have sadly to admit that somehow we and especially our educational colleagues have failed to impress enough people with the need for reading. Must we reconcile ourselves to this restricted activity and to the mean attitude which accepts as reasonable the possession, in our communal capacity, of only one or two books a head?

R. H. HILL, M.A., F.L.A. (*Librarian and Secretary to the Trustees, National Central Library*).

There are doubtless many lessons to be learned from the last hundred years. One is that no library, however well equipped for its immediate needs, can always be complete even for those ; and the librarian has come to regard his function as a distributor rather than as a keeper of the books in his care. One of the most significant movements of the last half-century has been the growth of the spirit of co-operation, directed mainly to the lending of books between libraries. Beginning with public libraries, this co-operation now extends to almost all other types and has achieved a high degree of organisation. The conception of a co-ordinated system for meeting the needs of all kinds of students was in men's minds at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the establishment in 1916 of the Central Library for Students, later reconstituted as the National Central Library, was one of its first-fruits. A system of library co-operation on a regional basis necessarily followed from it and took definite and comprehensive shape within a remarkably short period of years. Here again we can fittingly congratulate the pioneers, many of whom are happily with us, while at the same time we recognise our own duty to consolidate and develop their work.

W. C. BERWICK SAYERS, F.L.A. (*formerly Chief Librarian, Croydon, and Past President of the Library Association*).

First, and foremost, the success of the determination of librarians and their supporters to defy the limitations others would set to their work. These were really imposed by the people who, so far as they were readers, grouped themselves into those who used Mudie and the like and those whose poverty confined them to "free" libraries. The condition has not gone entirely but exists now only in a fainter, less arrogant, form. The two groups to-day are not mutually exclusive. I like to think this is because

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the foundations of the public library were laid so well by Edward Edwards that the dazzling structures raised by the McColvins could be borne by them.

Second, that such a movement, if the right men come into it by accident or choice, is none the worse for having to face severe difficulties. This has been our case. The "penny-rate limitation" brought out most of our policy and our invention for three generations and it still energises librarians even if they are unconscious of it. We had to prove, and we did prove, that a library service was the indispensable corollary of universal free schooling and, even before we arrived, knew that "a city without books is a city without light."

Third, that the future rests in no small degree upon a wise, progressive direction of children's reading in and out of libraries. Progress in the past thirty years has most probably come through a race of readers who as children used children's libraries.

Fourth, that public librarians have throughout been inspired by zeal for the book; have believed in its social value so much that, for the worst remuneration ever given to public servants of equal rank, they have been content to be their purveyor and the acolytes of readers. They have educated and organised themselves to this end so that books might be "in widest commonalty spread." They experiment continually to bring book and reader together more effectively—sometimes quite fantastically; but their errors are soon cancelled and the good persists. And, gradually, the profession has emerged, is recognised, if not fully, and is better recompensed, if not adequately.

And, finally, librarianship can never become the sealed book some have alleged it to be. New days bring new men, new methods and enterprises. They have not yet erased the old; possibly they never will. But we need new ideas continually. May I add that the best lessons I have learned have been from librarian friends, old and young, many of whom were members of our Association, then the L.A.A., now the A.A.L.?

ERNEST A. SAVAGE, LL.D., F.L.A. (*formerly Librarian, Edinburgh Public Libraries; Past President of the Library Association*).

Lessons? That means how to profit from our mistakes. At any rate, let Centenary orators blow out round mouthfuls of dope about our successes!

In early days the municipal librarian sought, as a rule, to form libraries of some breadth in subject matter and distinction in quality. Later, especially during the first great war, he was content, again as a rule, to push round "something to read." Once more he reversed. After between-the-war blues he repented and turned his mind again to the earlier ideal, but to a library of greater breadth and finer distinction. "Tu'penny library" competition almost finished the cure. The books got dearer.

In our beginning, urban transport was non-existent, or a drooping horse at rest in a tram-loop. The library service area therefore was peppered with petty branches, and to provide them central budgets were scrooged. Another blunder inevitably followed: reference libraries were gorged with books doomed to be unemployed instead of being worn-out in home-reading libraries. And old Conservatism and tough Obstruction waved proud arms

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in these cemeteries and cried: "Would you see our monument? Then look about you!" These two blunders also favoured the "something to read" policy. Is it too late to hope for large, centrally-disposed subject-department libraries on the model of the great stores?

Many questions call for intensive study and critical discussion: the child as reader and the library he wants; observation and analysis of the use of books; the encouragement of a broader basis of culture; promotion of the art of attentive, visioning reading; more direct methods of making the contents of libraries known; brighter buildings to make their contents known; house-to-house surveys of library needs in country districts; extension of bibliographical aids to country districts; special departments in general libraries—oh! and much more not to be squeezed into the space allowed. Let us look forward.

What of the needs of lone students living in small towns and rural areas? The authorities of the N.C.L. take too restricted a view of their functions. They should agitate vigorously for reconstruction of their building. They should plan and agitate for a post-free lending service to any accredited reader in any part of Britain and Northern Ireland. And local librarians should not obstruct this direct service from N.C.L. to reader, for they don't cover their own narrow fields adequately.

All the above means that for 100 years we have cherished too low an estimate of the value of good libraries to society. Whether in city or university, in town or country, the library should co-operate in every educational activity and be subordinate to none.

A few sterile years ago the L.A. gave issue to a turgid pamphlet of post-war proposals. Its burden was that our service was debilitated and afflicted with black spots. True! But let members ask sometimes, even quite often: "Is the L.A. worthy of the service, even as it is?" An example or so. Our conferences are socially gay and educationally barren. We allow authority members to take part in and to spoil proceedings which they don't understand. We neglect to open even one provincial branch of our H.Q. whence local authorities might be prodded. As a club, our London H.Q. is a failure. Our professional library is one of the worst institutional libraries in London, with books scattered three floors apart; card catalogue in a hole; reading-room a rabbit hutch in the sky, with hardly a plank for a table! When are we to have a spacious, comfortable reading-room, with a catalogue at hand and books all together? Long ago this "library" and the Greenwood should have had a joint catalogue printed. Who is responsible? Not the Librarian and his staff; in no way are they to blame. The Council is the delinquent. It shouts "Libraries for Everyman," and sniggers to itself: "Librarians can do without one." Five special librarians from research and industrial libraries should be appointed a commission to tell the Council what to do—about its library and about a number of things. The L.A. library should be a model institutional library.

The L.A. is far too complacent. But ultimately whose is the fault? For the last Annual Election, 6,787 voting papers were sent out; only 2,370 were returned. What a tale these figures tell of cozy, dozy, don't-care-a-damn bureaucracy! Centenary? We need a mass burial.